

HIE's destruction of skiing at Cairngorm

Description

Readers' letters

More ski uplift is needed

HIGHLANDS and Islands Enterprise (HIE), with the support of the mountain's operator Cairngorm Mountain Ltd (CML)/Natural Retreats (NR), completed clear-felling the entire line of towers on the West Wall Chairlift this past week, and have now commenced cutting down the lower Ciste chairlift. As we watched, heavy plant smashed apart the West Wall chairlift drive station.

The demolition is not limited to the two chairlifts. Teams of personnel are presently also at work removing snow fencing (and therefore the ski runs) at the Aonach.

We expect work will most likely start soon on the removal of snow fencing which form the ski runs at the East Wall traverse, the Aonach Ridge, and the circuitous route through Coire Laogh Mor.

This snow fencing is critical for ensuring access to the East Wall ski runs, for maintaining snow holding into Coire Laogh Mor, and for ensuring a number of return routes remain skiable back to the Ciste carpark.

It was a way for self-sufficient skiers enjoy a bit more of Coire na Ciste, despite the operator's uplift removal.

Without this fencing, the number of days in which these ski runs are complete, and in which it is possible to ski to the Ciste Carpark, would be significantly reduced.

This demolition has been instigated by HIE utilising £267,000

of public funds, without public consultation, against the strong wishes of the community, and despite both HIE and the mountain operator being made aware this year of the community interest in taking over control of the Coire na Ciste site and chairlifts.

Such is the determination to completely clear the Coire na Ciste chairlifts, and ensure that no part of the lift system would be useful on the mountain again, that the contractor is simply cutting the towers from their bases, rather than undoing the bolts.

Further, the towers themselves have been cut in half, resulting in them now being only fit for scrapping.

If the contractors get as far as demolishing the lift tower bases then it will be difficult and expensive to gain planning permission to re-erect chairlifts in Coire na Ciste in the future.

The same is true for the prospect of reinstating any of the fenced ski runs on the mountain's remoter parts, which are likely to soon be lost.

All of the above actions, once complete, will therefore make it much more difficult for any community body to bring about the change of strategic direction that is required to upscale the mountain business and make it a destination of choice for snow-sports enthusiasts as it was when Cairn Gorm was Scotland's premier snow-sports area (an accolade that has been lost).

HIE's press release promised that the public would be kept abreast of demolition progress by the mountain operator. As it stands today, the publicity from the mountain this week is for yoga classes and a season ticket promotion.

The majority of their customers have only found out about the demolition works through our publication of photographs.

Clearly they do not feel that it



COIRE NA CISTE: Toppled lift towers.

is in their customers' interests to publicise what is going on behind the scenes until, presumably, after the demolition event has been concluded – by which point it will of course be too late.

The past 10 years have, despite a series of 100,000 plus skier day winters, seen the removal of the White Lady T-Bar, the Fiacail T-Bar, the relocation of the Link Poma, the removal of the Aonach Poma, the replacement of the Shielling Tow with a rope tow, and now the removal of the Ciste Base Station, Ciste chairlifts, and pistes.

The Daylodge Poma would also have been removed was it not for a public outcry preventing it a decade ago. In real terms, this equates to a 33 per cent reduction in the mountain's total uplift capacity.

The 'core lift' model chosen on Cairn Gorm which led to this uplift reduction is a very different business

approach to the model chosen by the other Scottish ski centres.

At the other ski centres they operate opportunistically and maintain low overheads. When the snow is here, they have enough lift capacity to get the maximum possible number of customers onto their respective hills in any one day.

This results in the maximum possible number of tickets sold each day, and their customers are able to access the maximum possible amount of terrain that snow permits.

This ensures both customer satisfaction, and reduces the lift company's reliance on a long season: just a few 'big weekends' will pay them dividends. The pitfalls of the approach at Cairn Gorm Mountain are obvious, and Strathy readers can draw their own conclusions as to its success.

Jamie Johnstone
Save the Ciste Campaign
Aviemore & Edinburgh

Date for Rotarians

THE Rotary Club of Spey Valley will be 40 years old in September.

We are holding a dinner in Aviemore on September 27 to celebrate the time since we were granted our charter from Rotary International and we are inviting all past members, partners and anyone with a strong connection with our club.

Data Protection laws prevent us from keeping personal data for more than a couple of years so we are asking anyone who wishes to attend this historic dinner to get in touch so that we can invite them along.

I can be contacted by email at guscarnegie15@gmail.com or by calling (01479) 841749.

Gus Carnegie
Rotary Club of Spey Valley
Urquhart Brae
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Letter Badenoch and Strathspey Advertiser 31st August

This letter in response to the current destruction of ski infrastructure in Coire na Ciste provides an excellent summary of how downhill skiing has been managed by HIE at Cairngorm. It raises much wider issues of what are National Parks are for.

Also this week on BBC Highland there was a feature on HIE and Natural Retreats proposed dry ski slope above the Coire Cas carpark. HIE's vision for Cairngorm appears to have nothing to do with outdoor recreation. At its centre is a dry ski slope and an expanded restaurant at the top of the mountain where people are isolated from the natural environment by built structures.

By contrast the Coire na Ciste group's vision appears founded on the understanding that what is important to skiers at Cairngorm is the quality of the skiing and enjoyment of the natural environment. Their proposals – which HIE appears hell bent on thwarting – are in essence an attempt to develop a vision which fits the National Park's objectives: conservation, enjoyment of the outdoors and sustainable economic development.

Now there are questions about whether downhill skiing at Cairngorm is sustainable in the face of global warming, questions that the Save the Ciste group has been trying to address. However, I think they should be the starting point of public discussion about the future of Cairngorm. If they turned out not to be sustainable, we should then move on to a debate about alternative uses which met the National Park's objectives and are based on the natural environment.

The CNPA should be leading this debate and helping facilitate the development of a vision for Cairngorm. Instead, it appears completely subservient to HIE. The only way this is going to change is if the recreational and conservation organisations get together with the local community and develop an alternative plan for Cairngorm.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. HIE
3. landscape
4. natural retreats
5. Tourism

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